Share the Beach

Sea Turtle Volunteer Program

Newsletter of the USFWS Daphne Ecological Services Field Office

August 28, 2001

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Sea Turtle Facts

- Incubation temperatures above 86°F produce mostly females, while temps. below 82°F produce males.
- A 1.8°F decrease in temp. from shading or excessive rain may add five days to the incubation period.

Dear Sea Turtle Volunteers,

Our next meeting will be held on **September 18, 2001** at **Gulf State Park Resort**, **6:30 pm**. We will share our experiences with nest sitting, hatchlings, and related activities. We'll also discuss how our methods have worked out, whether they have failed or succeeded, and any changes we plan on implementing.

Before we get into the nitty-gritty here, we'd like to thank all of you for your long hours of nest-sitting and mosquito feeding. Without your continued support our program, as well as the hatchlings, would not survive.

News and Issues

Now that we're well into the hatchling season, and beach patrolling is just about done (we stop at the end of August), it is time to focus all our turtle energy on our nests. If you have not been able to nest sit, and wish to do so, please contact the team leaders in that area or call us. If you have been able to nest sit, thank you. We do realize that it requires long hours and are very thankful for your perseverance.

On that note, and we cannot stress this enough, if you or your team are not able to nest sit, or need a break from nest watching (especially sitting), please let Beth and Nathan (251-331-0835) know. Though our office is in Daphne, we are able to assist in nest sitting given notice in advance.

One of the strategies that has been working out for us is the use of a black tarp around the staked nest to create a dark enclosure. This keeps light off of the nest so turtles are not misoriented as they emerge. Though this does not solve the light pollution problem, it does help get the turtles into the trench. If you are not aware of how to construct this apparatus, please call us and we can instruct you how to do so.

Many of you have asked about using flashlights to lure the hatchlings to the water while keeping the flashlights out of the water as to not attract predators. While this seems like a good idea, even use of light near the waters edge, though not in the water, can attract predators. There are also a number of other reasons why we will not be using artificial light to lure the hatchlings. First of all it gives us little leverage when asking people on the beach to turn off their flashlights and porch lights when we are using lights. Secondly it

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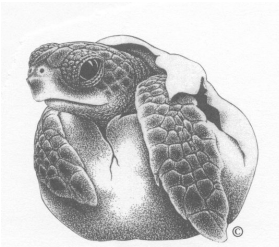

Share the Beach

Alpha – Orange Beach/Perdido Key
Charlie – Gulf State Park
Delta – Gulf Shores Beach
Echo – Laguna Key & West Beach West
Foxtrot I & II – West Beach East
Gulf – Fort

Floaters:
Homer Singleton: 251-943-8945
Trent & Jill Scott: 251-928-5967
Jenny Hayter 251-967-2424

does not help solve the light pollution problem. If people see us using lights to help the turtles they will think we have found a solution to the lighting problem and thus will not recognize that it is a problem at all. It also interferes with nature. Though we are already trenching, screening, and intervening with the natural process, using flashlights will only make this process more artificial. Flashlights, like other points of light on the beach, are very different than the moon and other celestial sources of light. Though we are not aware of any problems associated with this type of light regarding hatchling behavior (except for misorientation) there may be other affects of using artificial light that have not been discovered. Because we cannot be certain about so many factors affecting these turtles, it is better to be safe than sorry.

Nest Observation

When you observe any nests hatching we would like you to take a few notes on the various conditions of lighting that may exist that evening. This is because we want to have some documentation of misoriented turtles. Characteristics to take note of include the artificial light reaching the nests (direct sources, city glow), the moonlight that night (bright, dim, new moon), and the cloud cover (very cloudy, partially cloudy, clear).

Though all of you are doing this, we would like to remind you also to record the time of emergence of the first hatchling(s) or of separate emergences (when they don't all come out at once). This does not need to be very accurate, and categories such as early evening, late evening, early morning, etc. will be sufficient if the exact time is not known. We are trying to collect these details so we can recognize and understand any trends.

Incubation times have averaged 63-65 days so far this season. We encourage you to use this information so that you may better gauge when you should start nest monitoring activities. When a hatching event occurs, please mail your data sheet or call us the following morning with the details.

If you have been watching a nest and it is past its 65 day mark, as official volunteers you have permission to gently dig a shallow hole to ascertain the condition of the nest. This should help to avoid nest sitting through the 75th day on a dead nest. If you are worried about the water table rising from under a nest, you can dig with a shovel in an area near (not in) the nest to see how deep the water table is. The bottom of a nest can be a little more than 2 feet deep, so this should give you an idea of how close water is to the eggs.

Important Reminders!

Team leaders, please fax or mail us your nest sheets after an excavation has been completed for that nest. We are working on compiling a database of our nest information complete with GPS points, which we will gather for each nest. This will allow us to produce a map of all the nests and better analyze nest trends.

We cannot stress enough how much we appreciate all of your hard work and dedication!

Happy Turtling, Celeste, Nathan & Beth!